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of legitimate political action. Yet, traditional, oppositional, and alternative politics are not mutually exclusive. So while *A Postcapitalist Politics* is certainly not apolitical, I find it incompletely so.

Misgivings aside, Gibson-Graham's *A Postcapitalist Politics* challenges readers to move outside the tired, totalizing narratives of capitalist hegemony and homogeneity; of economic determinisms; of assertions of TINA *or else* the need for a hard-to-fathom systemic revolution that stymies creative intervention in the here and now. Though their "weak theory of economy" leaves us with surprise and uncertainty, it is here where the "politics of the possible" resides. We make our noncapitalist futures as we practice them, cultivated by experimentation and the ethical praxis of language, self-transformation, and collective action.

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Capabilities, Freedom, and Equality: Amartya Sen's Work from a Gender Perspective

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Amartya Sen's scholarship is well-established, with his Nobel Prize for economics in 1998 placing his diverse range of credentials, which include critiquing the philosophical underpinnings of orthodox economic theory, firmly within establishment economics. Many heterodox and political economists find him to be an inspirational figure for "nit-picking" away at mainstream economic theory, even as Sen himself has shied away from the "political economy" label (Hahnel 2002). Feminist economists are no exception in their respectful admiration for and deployment of Sen's works and ideas. This edited collection by Agarwal, Humphries, and Robeyns brings together a range of (mostly) feminist scholars as they engage with Sen's ideas, whether critically or sympathetically.¹ The OUP edition also includes five of Sen's seminal writings on critical concepts such as gender inequality and theories of justice, capabilities, and freedoms which are discussed and employed by the contributors to this volume.²

1. The edited collection draws upon all the articles published on Amartya Sen's contributions as a special issue in *Feminist Economics* 9(2&3): July/November 2003.

2. Because the latter are reproductions of Sen's previous work, this review will limit itself to the core of this book, i.e. the contributions made by numerous researchers working with Sen's conceptual categories.

The edition consists of twelve essays contributed by established scholars, such as Martha Nussbaum, Stephan Klasen, and Stanley Engerman, together with emerging researchers: Marianne Hill, Des Gasper, Irene van Staveren, to name a few. The editors bring together contributions made from a gender perspective on social choice theory (Peter), capabilities (Nussbaum, Robeyns), inequality and social power (Iversen, Hill), freedom and agency (Des Gasper, van Staveren, Koggel, Engerman, Anderson), and women's well-being (Beutelspacher, Martelo and Garcia, Klasen and Wink, Fukuda-Parr). The themes explored lend themselves to both theoretical and empirical analysis so as to offer the reader a rich kaleidoscope of the ways in which Sen's ideas are applied in numerous contexts. Moreover, the initial section of the edited volume includes not just contributions by these varied scholars but also a couple of conversations between the editors and Sen which to some extent press the Nobel Laureate for omissions and silences in his work. My intention in this review is not to summarize each contribution in this impressive collection, but rather pick a few themes and assess the ways in which they illustrate Sen's potential and limits in contributing to heterodox economics.

A frequent criticism levied against Sen's work is that he evades the theme of social power in his work on capabilities and gender relations (Hill 2006: 132; see also Hahnel 2002). While Sen disagrees with this point in the conversation that he has with the editors (352), this lapse is explored in some detail by Marianne Hill. She takes the view that the failure of the capability approach to deal with issues of social power has meant that women's well-being is negatively affected. This is because social relationships are institutionalized in ways that mask power relationships, and the absence of bringing to bear social power within the capability approach implies that any analysis of social well-being is unavoidably partial. In this regard, Hill calls for the articulation of "an approach to human empowerment that ties social outcomes to actual institutional arrangements...(so that) we can act as catalysts for the creation of knowledge that effectively advances the goal of human freedom" (147). Iversen makes a similar point, although within a methodologically individualist framework. This time the subject of scrutiny is individual relations within the household and intra-household inequality, where the need for recognizing interdependencies and power relationships with a call for careful attention to be paid to concepts of agency, choice, and freedom is noted.

Freedom is another theme which emanates in this collection, where contributors both challenge and engage with Sen's broad use of the term. Freedom is not a concept that only has positive connotations. Des Gasper and van Staveren, for instance, point out the need for a situated and substantive notion of freedom because the embodiment of freedom in the absence of democracy, care, and respect, for example, can be misleading. They argue for a "plurality of development, beyond only freedom" (173) and convincingly point out that at least it needs to comprise freedom and justice. Anderson's sympathetic reading of the contributions made by Sen on democracy and ethics points out how value judgments made from local positional politics and knowledge are a means of promoting shared responsibilities and outcomes. She points out that even as the practice of institutionalized democracy has not eradicated deprivation among marginal social groups, a persuasive case remains to be made for deliberative democracy. Engerman, Koggel, and Nussbaum pursue similar lines of thinking with the purpose of pointing to the positive and negative dimensions of freedom, with Koggel credibly asking whether paid employment necessarily increases women's freedom and agency in all places. She illuminates the numerous ways

in which women's agency is subject to local and global power dynamics, and hence raises the need for caution when promoting "women's workforce participation as an adequate development policy" (198).

Nussbaum's takes on the concept of freedom also have to do with her concern for Sen's failure to support a specific list of human capabilities. Robeyns too makes a similar point, although here the unease has to do with pragmatic reasons vis-à-vis Nussbaum. They both champion the need for a well defined list of capabilities as this is likely to be a potentially useful yield for measuring quality of life achievements. Does Sen's unwillingness to offer such a specific listing have to do with his recognition of the difficulty in attempting to achieve equality of capability as a social goal? Moreover, will such a specification of listing – advocated here by liberal feminist scholars – fail to recognize the politics and power relations inherent in such a task which is likely to be highly fraught, especially from a developmental perspective? Whose lists? Whose priorities? These too are critical questions which liberal advocates are likely to be uneasy answering, should such a situation arise.

Peter's contribution is the lone essay on social choice theory, where she makes the claim for a nuanced reading where gender interests be taken into account through a wider conceptualization of social choice. She makes the case for shifting the problem aggregating individual preference as the focus of social choice theory as this does not aid women's agency and involvement in democratic and public life.

These rich and engaging theoretical explorations are complemented with the ways in which Sen's ideas have influenced empirical work. Klasen and Wink develop and discuss alternative methodologies to revisit the theme of "missing women," and assess the global picture where systematic gender biases in "the allocation of resources, nutrition and health outcomes" continue (286). Beutelspacher, Martelo, and Garcia use family planning policies in Mexico as an entry point to show how seemingly positive policies and outcomes may in reality contravene women's interest because they are not active participants in the designing and implementing of policies. They emphasize the need to examine how "the life options that rural communities offer to women are key elements in understanding women's well-being" (281). The final contribution is by Fukuda-Parr who discusses the contribution of Sen's ideas on capabilities to advance human development indices, and hence the policy implications and practical applications of his work.

This is an important collection of essays which brings together some key contributions to show the ways in which feminist scholarship can (and ought to) enrich Sen's critical thinking and scholarship. Some of the lapses these scholars point to, however, are emblematic of Sen's own reluctance to move away from his embeddings in methodological individualism and offer alternative articulations of theorizing which rupture radically from a market-based economic system (see also Hahnel 2002; Ruwanpura 2007). Notwithstanding this disquiet, this is a worthy read for political economy, development, and feminist scholars interested in engaging in intellectual debates tinted with mild degrees of heterodox thought and spirit.

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Matrilineal Communities, Patriarchal Realities: A Feminist Nirvana Uncovered

Kanchana Ruwanpura, The University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 2006

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Households are often understood as well-defined isolated homogeneous units, especially within those economic theories and policies that are based in methodological individualism. Kanchana Ruwanpura delves into the historical and political dimensions of Muslim, Sinhala, and Tamil households in Sri Lanka and brings out the heterogeneity of households and complexity of ethnicity, gender, and kinship. Her case studies contribute towards what we can call a grounded feminist theorizing of the household. Furthermore, the author ventures into an exploration that goes beyond cultural relativism without ignoring cultural variation, and thus the book also addresses important methodological problems. Finally, the issues of theory and methodology manifested by the case studies lead to questions of development policy formulation: how to address the immediate economic concerns of female-headed households without reinforcing gender stereotypes.

Female headship is an important topic within gender and development, not only in empirical studies, but also in theorizing about patriarchal relations. Ruwanpura already has published on female headship (Ruwanpura and Humphries 2004). For those specifically studying South Asia, the book would be especially interesting as it is a study of eastern Sri Lanka, where ethnic conflict, as stated by the author, has been an obstacle to conducting research in that region. In the book Ruwanpura goes beyond the subject matter of war widows in ethnic conflict areas, and focuses on female-headship as a manifestation of other social processes.

At the outset, Ruwanpura cautions us of accepting the applauded success of Sri Lanka in terms of gender equality and warns that indicators such as a human development index, as well as evidenced matrilineal and bilateral inheritance patterns and property rights, do not give the entire picture with respect to women's experiences. The author argues that there are patriarchal structures even in the presence of female heads of households, and points out that recognizing the existence of these structures is important, as they are often the cause of economic deprivation. Ruwanpura calls for appreciation of both commonality and interconnectedness in terms of gender images, as well as differences in terms of experiences related to ethnicity and religion.

Ruwanpura argues that even progressive accounts of family relations, such as the gender and cooperative conflicts framework utilized by Sen (1990) and Agarwal (1997) that focuses on decision making affected by existing social structures, still treat households as bounded, unitary, and homogeneous units. The reason, according to the author, is that these analyses assume standard patriarchal relations. The book fleshes out the complexities of patriarchal relations in the context of a multi-ethnic and a multi-religious Sri Lanka. Chapters four, five,